

# ‘Entrepreneurship’ as a conceptual attractor? A review of process theories in 20 years of entrepreneurship studies

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Entrepreneurship has never achieved a breakthrough as the key concept that could elucidate the inherently process-oriented character of entrepreneurship, but it may be able to serve as the conceptual attractor to accommodate the increasing interest in process theories within a creative process view. This paper considers whether this is possible. In addition to equilibrium-based understandings of the entrepreneurial process, this paper tentatively reconstructs the creative process view by distinguishing between a range of relevant perspectives: from those on complexity and chaos theory, to the interpretive and phenomenological, social constructionist, pragmatic and practice-based, to the relational materialist. Taking entrepreneurship as an open-ended concept to use in theoretical experimentation, the review documents the potential for the concept to develop new meanings and to attach itself to a series of concepts such as recursivity, enactment, disclosure, narration, discourse, dramatization, dialogicality, effectuation, social practice, translation and assemblage. It is argued that the very act of theorizing about the concept of ‘entrepreneurship’ indicates a move from methodological individualism to a relational turn in entrepreneurship studies, one that inscribes entrepreneurship into a social ontology of becoming.

*Keywords:* entrepreneurship; creative process view; process theory; becoming; social theory.

## 1. Entrepreneurship: from slow motion to a conceptual attractor?

A process theory of entrepreneurship, which I call ‘entrepreneurship’, is long overdue in entrepreneurship theory and is in my view urgently needed. Taking seriously the encouragement to approach entrepreneurship as a verb (hence ‘entrepreneurship’) that points at one of the most inventive human activities, I note that the term ‘entrepreneurship’ never became a conceptual attractor<sup>1</sup> around which a different terminus for entrepreneurial theory could spontaneously self-organize. Although entrepreneurship has been suggested several times as a concept that points at the inherent processual character of entrepreneurship, its use has never led to a breakthrough or to more general visibility for process *theory*. One of the term’s first uses occurred in an executive forum where Macmillan (1986: 242) made a plea to develop ‘a comprehensive theory of entrepreneurship’.<sup>2</sup> However, more than 20 years later, no such comprehensive theory has been developed, and it seems that the notion of entrepreneurship, instead of being appreciated as a fertile concept for understanding the processual aspect of entrepreneurship, continues to be used in a casual rather than

a rigorous way. For instance, while the term ‘entrepreneurship’ has figured in paper titles (Anderson 1998, Vinten and Alcock 2004), it played no central conceptual role.

Furthermore, the term is mostly deployed to denote a quality of a person rather than a process. For instance, Apospori *et al.* (2004) speak of ‘entrepreneurship minds’, while Scharmer and Käufer (2001) mention ‘the entrepreneurship human being’ and Chell (2000) conceives of ‘entrepreneurship as a skill’ of the entrepreneur. The concept seems to be used in elusive and atheoretical ways, especially because its users fail to acknowledge that ‘to talk of entrepreneurship as “entrepreneurship” has major implications for how we think of entrepreneurial knowledge, theory, and methods’ (Steyaert 1997: 19). The still scarce work on entrepreneurship reveals a scientific discourse that has rarely added much to our processual understanding of entrepreneurship. Making this observation even more surprising, reviews on theorizing entrepreneurship, especially those focusing on and stressing the idea of ‘emergence’, continue to emphasize that the process of entrepreneurship should receive more scholarly attention (Fuller *et al.* 2006). This leads to another question: have process theories been arising and developing in slow motion since Macmillan’s initial reference and, more generally, since the inception of entrepreneurship studies?

Still, it does not follow from the points above that the field of entrepreneurship studies lacks a stream of process theories. Instead, processual theories of entrepreneurship have appeared without explicit reference to the concept of ‘entrepreneurship’, raising another question: can the notion of ‘entrepreneurship’ itself function as its common denominator and be usefully linked to the increasing breadth and complexity of attempts to theorize process? To answer that question, I will first construct a tentative overview of the spectrum of process-oriented theories, where it will become clear that the initial slow motion has been sped up and that the focus on process is shifting: from being one of the most over-used and under-explained notions in entrepreneurship theory, process is now coming to show great potential for future theorizing. My review will draw distinctions between a number of perspectives, each of which provides a very different conceptualization of process. These perspectives include those on development, evolution, complexity and chaos theory, as well as the interpretive/phenomenological and social constructionist (and its narrative, dramaturgical and discursive offspring). Afterwards, I discuss the pragmatic and practice-based perspectives and the actor-network theory and radical processual perspectives. Table 1 provides an overview of these many perspectives.

Second, I believe that this review will debunk the idea that only ‘one comprehensive’ processual theory is possible. I will argue that after a slow start, today several promising candidates can give form to a more substantial conceptualization of entrepreneurship. My argument implies, then, that we must consider several simultaneous and overlapping routes of theorizing process. To be sure, the term process theory is elusive (Van de Ven and Poole 1995) and therefore potentially misleading. Thus I will suggest reserving the term entrepreneurship only for those process theories formulated within the so-called creative process view (Sarasvathy *et al.* 2003), leaving out the discovery perspective (Shane and Venkataraman 2000) and the evolutionary perspective (Aldrich 1999) which both speak of processes in an entitative<sup>3</sup> and equilibrium-based way. These new routes for theorizing entrepreneurship as entrepreneurship might help in major ways to address the ever-pressing intensification of conceptual and theoretical work that the field of entrepreneurship studies still needs after more than 20 years.

**Table 1. Process approaches to entrepreneurship.**

		<i>Complexity theory and chaos theory</i>											
<i>Approach</i>	<i>Developmental</i>	<i>Evolutionary</i>	<i>Interpretive</i>	<i>Phenomenological</i>	<i>Narrative</i>	<i>Dramatological</i>	<i>Discursive</i>	<i>Social constructionist</i>	<i>Pragmatist</i>	<i>Practice-based</i>	<i>ANT Approach</i>	<i>Radical processual</i>	
<b>Core concept</b>	Stages, lifecycles	Variation, natural selection and retention	Order creation, recursivity, self-organization	Enactment, sense-making	Lived experience, disclosure	Storyed life	Performance, self-presentation, dialogicality	Discursive construction, interpretive repertoires, entrepreneur mentality	Cultural practices, texture, structuration	Effectuation or generation of conditions and alternatives	Transindividual social practices, practical coping and dwelling	Translation; mobilization and stabilization, trajectory	Duration, creative involvement; affect
<b>Main inspiration</b>	Comte	Darwin	Prigogine, Gleick, Lewin	Weick, Gadamer	Husserl, Heidegger, Schutz	Bruner, Ricoeur	Goffman, Bakhtin	Foucault, Potter & Wetherell	Mead, Berger & Luckmann, Gergen	Dewey, Joas	Schatzki, Bourdieu, Wittgenstein	Callon, Latour, Greimas	Bergson, Whitehead, Deleuze
<b>Illustrative research</b>	Greiner 1988 [1972], Galbraith (1982)	Aldrich & Martinez (2001), Gersick (1994)	McKelvey (2004), Fuller & Warren (2006), Lichtenstein (2007)	Lavoie (1991), Gartner (1993), Bjerke (2007)	Spinoza <i>et al.</i> (1997), Cope (2005), Berglund (2007)	Steyaert (1997), O'Connor (2004)	Downing (2005), Steyaert (2004a)	Oghor (2000), Bruni, Gherardi & Poggio (2004)	Fletcher (2006), Lindgren & Packendorff (2006)	Sarasvathy (2001)	De la Ville (2003)	Gherardi & Nicolini (2005), Stathopoulou <i>et al.</i> (2004)	Orge (2007), Sorensen (2006)
<b>Key assumptions</b>	Linearity, growth, progression	(punctuated) Equilibrium theory, competition	Connectionism, non-linear interactions, random process	Cultural embeddedness, theoretical holism	History making, intentionality, sensitivity, articulation	Story lines, employment, narrative structuring	Embodiment, addressivity	Power knowledge nexus	Relationality, non-dualistic, conversationalism	Non-teleological Immanent logic of practice, practical holism, sociality of inertia	Assemblages, materialist relationalism	Flux (eras of time), rhizomatic logic, becoming	

Above all, I believe that this kind of theoretical exposure might open up the narrow and rarely questioned heritage of entrepreneurship studies in its connection to classical economics and mainstream psychology and might make the field of entrepreneurship more sensitive to the potential of social theoretical and eventually philosophical thinking. The ultimate idea is to uproot entrepreneurship studies and to envision it as a field of creative efforts that unfold along a rhizomatic logic (Steyaert 2005).<sup>4</sup> Taking such a rhizomatic perspective, I would reclaim the notion of ‘entrepreneuring’ not to establish a fine-grained and well-defined construct – hence the broad range of approaches that I will connect it to – but to suggest a generative and travelling concept (Steyaert and Janssens 1999). This concept can increase the connections with new theoretical perspectives that so far have been kept outside the strongly policed disciplinary boundaries of entrepreneurship studies. In my view, the practice-based and relational-materialist approaches, which have been the least used in entrepreneurship studies, hold the greatest potential for those who conceive of entrepreneuring within a creative process view beyond its current, mostly interpretive, social constructionist and pragmatist use. More accurately, the practiced-based and relational-materialist perspectives bring the field of entrepreneurship studies away from methodological individualism and closer to a social ontology of relatedness.

The structure of the paper is as follows. In the next section, I discuss the early equilibrium-based understandings of the entrepreneurial process in the form of developmental and evolutionary models. In section 3 I introduce the perspectives of complexity and chaos theory, which question the assumption of equilibrium. Section 4 focuses on interpretive and phenomenological understandings of process, while section 5 centres on the social constructionist approach and its narrative, dramaturgical and discursive offspring. At that point in the paper, we will cross an invisible line as the next perspectives are either new or so far rarely used in entrepreneurship studies. In section 6, the pragmatist and practice-based perspectives are introduced, while in section 7 actor-network theory and radical materialist understandings of process are briefly sketched. In the concluding section, I suggest to turn to a social ontology of relatedness in order to guide the further unfolding of process perspectives within a creative process view as entrepreneurship studies explores the conceptual potential of entrepreneuring in the years to come.

## **2. Early equilibrium-based understandings of the entrepreneurial process**

Early attempts to theorize the entrepreneurial process have been enacted in metaphors of ‘development’ and ‘growth’. Process is phrased in the language of so-called growing pains to describe how young organizations mature and grow in stage models, lifecycle models and models of organizational development. A classical example is Greiner’s (1998 [1972]) model, which describes a normative-linear process<sup>5</sup> as consisting of different cycles of growth that young companies must tackle during various crises and moments of evolution and revolution and of convergence and divergence. This model has inspired many variations, based on empirical, conceptual or contextual arguments. Although the range of such models is quite broad, they are similar in relying on linear-normative assumptions. That is, they all hold that the ‘development’ of a new venture follows a relatively linear, progressive and sequential process with identifiable stages, and they all suggest that these ideal-type models progress in

a deterministic way, as if following an immanent programme or regulation. In short, this form of developmental theorizing has been critiqued by theorists who point out its core assumptions of linearity, causality, predictability and equilibrium and found them to be far too abstract and general to adequately explain what happens 'as it happens' in the shift between periods (Frank and Lueger 1997, Downing 2005).

Second, evolutionary approaches have an explicit interest in process (Aldrich and Ruef 2006), but do not focus on the developmental stages of a single organization. Instead, they study how organizations are founded and disbanded, by following the movements of populations of organizations and the evolution of communities. They conceive of the process of evolution as 'the operation of four generic processes: variation, selection, retention and diffusion (Aldrich 1999: 21) and aim to explain how certain organizations survive while others disappear from the organizational landscape. Thus, evolutionary theory is interested in how the structural forms of populations of organizational entities are changing across communities, industries or society at large (Van de Ven and Poole 1995). Further, the theory tries to explain the recurrent, cumulative, and probabilistic progression of the continuous cycle of variation, selection and retention that explains how and why many organizations are called but few are chosen (Aldrich and Martinez 2001).

A more recent critique, which questions the idea of evolution as cumulative, occurring without great or sudden modifications, was developed under the name of the punctuated equilibrium model (Romanelli and Tushman 1994). This model has also been examined in studies of the entrepreneurial process (Hansen and Bird 1997), leading to accounts of less predictable blueprints of convergence and upheaval (Tushman *et al.* 1986). These punctuated equilibrium models reject the linear-normative character of the life-cycle models; instead, they take as their point of departure stochastic models, which frame processes using both time-based and event-based pacing methods, breaking up the ideal-typical patterns of stages and the cumulative idea of evolution (Gersick 1994). Van de Ven and Engleman (2004), following Aldrich's distinction between outcome-driven and event-driven research, associate evolutionary process theories with an event-based scope; they follow ontological assumptions different from those in variance theory and suggest a narrative approach (see below) to unlock a more fundamental perspective for understanding temporal processes. While no pure form of evolutionary theory may exist (Aldrich 1999), it can be criticized for working equally well within an equilibrium model of process (McKelvey 2004).

Furthermore, and more importantly, what these perspectives share is their entitative focus. That is, they presuppose several entities such as people, organizations, populations, technology, etc. and claim that they exist ontologically, prior to and hence independent of the process. In other words, these perspectives patently leave out the possibility of recursivity and the chance to explain how these 'entities' are themselves emerging and must be understood as effects of particular processes. As a consequence of this entitative logic, many studies suggest that entrepreneurship research primarily needs a multi-level approach, but they fail to explain how these levels came to be distinguished in the first place (Davidsson and Wiklund 2001, Aldrich and Martinez 2003). Taking refuge in new theories of complexity and chaos that look at equilibrium and causality from a different scope, McKelvey (2004: 336) argues explicitly 'that evolutionary theory is a poor choice of theoretical approaches to apply to the study of entrepreneurship' and that it provides little insight into emergence.<sup>6</sup>

### 3. Order creation in complexity and chaos theory

Except for some early applications (Bygrave 1989), the use of complexity and chaos theory in entrepreneurship studies is quite recent (McKelvey 2004, Fuller and Warren 2006), and is renewing interest in the concept of emergence as a central description of process. Fuller and Moran (2000) make the case that entrepreneurship and small firms can especially make use of notions from complexity science, which makes it possible to conceptualize emergence as a form of autopoiesis or 'as a reflexive or self-organized, creative or generative process, whose form may be empirically observed, or whose presence empirically sensed' (pp. 57–58). Inspired by the interest that complexity science takes in ways of creating order, entrepreneurship is seen as creating emergence through order creation and self-emergence.

These perspectives result in changes in one main assumption: that organizational emergence involves activities that evolve in a non-linear and interdependent way. Thus the focus turns away from isolated actions and activities to the recursive dynamics between external and internal complexity as new relations are created internally and as new inter-organizational relations are initiated externally. McKelvey (2004), a pioneer in the complexity science of entrepreneurship, situates complexity theorizing between the Scylla of thin descriptions of entrepreneurship based on econometric analyses of time-series data and the Charybdis of thick descriptions in narrative analysis (see below). This allows him to suggest a form of heterogeneous agent-based computational modelling that integrates insights from 'thick-description, postmodernist, process-based research' (McKelvey 2004: 316). He draws on insights from several sources: complexity theory from the European school, chaos theory from the American school, and postmodernist descriptions of complex causation. Based on these insights, he suggests that we study and model entrepreneurship as a non-linear outcome resulting from phase transitions which are caused by adaptive tensions and by processes of positive feedback set in motion by seemingly inconsequential instigating events.

The conceptual nature of McKelvey's contribution shows that the field's primary emphasis has been on conceptual explorations and modelling, while empirical studies only enter the literature bit by bit. For instance, Lichtenstein (2000), using a qualitative methodology, studied two rapidly growing entrepreneurial firms as non-linear dynamic systems and documented their transformative shifts along the basic assumptions of constant change, irreducibility, mutual interdependence and non-proportionality. Using data from a large database, Lichtenstein *et al.* (2007) provided empirical evidence to claim that complexity dynamics are linked to organizational emergence and to the temporal signature of an event history, where start-up activities are concentrated later rather than earlier over time. Fuller and Warren (2006), studying two entrepreneurial ventures in high-velocity business environments, documented how the emergence and negotiation of entrepreneurial practices represents a social process with multiple relational causes and complex outcomes.

The focus on emergence and order creation in complexity science seems to coincide with the core question of organizational emergence in entrepreneurship studies, one that has occupied a whole generation of entrepreneurship scholars. It thus comes as no surprise that people in the field have great expectations for this exchange. That is, they speak of 'the value of using complexity science to explain and study the new venture creation process' (Lichtenstein *et al.* 2007: 257) and confirm that 'a complexity

science-based approach to entrepreneurial success and failure shows promise' (Maguire *et al.* 2006: 203). This promise is not without risks as we see from explorations in the field of organization studies where researchers have still not answered the early question of whether complexity science is just a fad or 'could very well transform organization studies' (Maguire *et al.* 2006: 165).

Complexity science, drawing inspiration from many streams of thought, is derived from the natural and life sciences and from systems theory and has been adopted in the social sciences into an 'emergence paradigm' (Sawyer 2005). Its radical ontological and epistemological stance, which 'holds the same ontological view as postpositivists and postmodernists' (McKelvey 2004: 322), is enormous and not easy to validate empirically. This fact, in turn, raises new methodological challenges of modelling and simulation and brings inventive methodological combinations into the realm of entrepreneurship studies. However, part of its promise lies in the possibility of inscribing principles of complexity theory in interpretive and narrative perspectives (Maguire *et al.* 2006), in order to formulate its contribution to social theory (Sawyer 2005) and to bring it into conversation with postmodern and poststructuralist ideas (Cilliers 1998). All these seem to be viable options in future theorizing about the entrepreneurial process as emergence.

#### **4. The life-worlds of interpretive and phenomenological attempts**

Interpretive approaches take issue with the entitative and a-temporal stance of the early understandings of the entrepreneurial process. They critique the assumption that all kinds of entities and variables are claimed *a priori* to determine the process rather than the other way around, and they regret that neither time nor context is taken into consideration. These approaches simultaneously take issue with the mono-causal and objectivist kinds of explanations that reify and stabilize processes into variables instead of showing the fragile, emerging and provisional character of any kind of 'unit' that emerges from and is embedded within a process. These writers especially deserve credit for having turned entrepreneurship into a verb, taking inspiration from Weick (1979) who had earlier urged organization theorists to stamp out nouns in favour of verbs and to speak of organizing instead of organization. In this perspective, entrepreneurship is seen as a process of sensemaking where new ideas and possibilities become enacted, selected and legitimated until potential users come to accept them. Enactment theories of entrepreneurship (Gartner 1993, Gartner *et al.* 2003) conceive of the (creation) process as the organizing of new organizations.

Building on Weick's attempt to develop a processual language, Gartner is seeking a 'vocabulary' of organizational emergence; as a result he takes entrepreneurial emergence into the direction of organizing (Gartner and Brush 2007). However, while Gartner (1993) focuses on words as being, emergence and genesis, he does not go so far as to opt for notions such as becoming and entrepreneuring. Taking Weick's understanding of enactment as a backdrop, Gartner *et al.* (1992: 17) see emerging organizations as thoroughly equivocal realities 'that tend towards non-equivocality through entrepreneurial action'. They continue: 'In emerging organizations, entrepreneurs offer plausible explanations of current and future equivocal events as non-equivocal interpretation. Entrepreneurs talk and act "as if" equivocal events are

non-equivocal. Emerging organizations are elaborate fictions of proposed possible future states of existence’.

Essentially, the effort to construe organizational emergence as a process attempts to pull attention away from the heroic creator, although this attempt contains a reifying tendency towards the entitative ‘emerging organizations’. Moreover, Gartner suggests that we speak of founding since its double meaning can emphasize ‘the equivocal nature of creation as a process, rather than assuming that creation always is a successful outcome’ (Gartner 1993: 234).

For Gartner, the notion of enactment is crucial if we are to counteract the conventional understanding in entrepreneurship that opportunities can be recognized and discovered as if they are already there waiting to be seen, noticed or found. This objectivist perspective holds that opportunities existing ‘out there’ turn ‘toward us a legible face which we would only have to decipher’ (Foucault 1984: 127). In contrast, the opportunity enactment perspective focuses on retrospective sensemaking; it emphasizes that reality is socially constructed through actions which bracket ‘a cacophony of experiences and opportunities that entrepreneurs are engaged in’ (Gartner *et al.* 2003: 110).

Entrepreneurship as a sensemaking process has been extended into an interpretive-hermeneutic approach, taking the concept of *Verstehen* as the point of departure (Lavoie 1991, Bjerke 2007). Inspired by Gadamer’s philosophy of hermeneutics, Lavoie positions interpretation as inherent within the cultural context that forms the background of purposeful action and that gives us the language ‘in which past events are interpreted, future circumstances are anticipated, and plans of action are formulated’ (Lavoie 1991: 34). As a consequence, Lavoie attempts to develop a fully-fledged interpretive theory of entrepreneurship out of Kirzner’s (1979) theory of the entrepreneur. Indeed, Lavoie emphasizes the interpretive stance in Kirzner’s work by documenting the argument that it is not possible to ‘discover’ opportunities without both transcending the prior interpretive framework and seeing a new one emerge. ‘Discovery’ of opportunity thus amounts to a shift of interpretive perspectives. However, Lavoie also identifies limitations in Kirzner’s theory of entrepreneurship, as it remains close to the equilibrium thinking of mainstream economics. By implication, it fails to focus on open-ended and genuinely creative evolutionary processes; thus it ultimately leaves no room ‘for genuine novelty, for truly creative change’ (Lavoie 1991: 43).

For Lavoie, ‘seeing an opportunity’ is not (just) noticing in a wave of alertness as one would find a 20-dollar bill in the park or on the beach. Rather, it is (always) an interpretation where a perception reconstructs sensation into a meaningful ‘thing’ against a continuously evolving cultural background. Rather than to choose an individualist explanation of alertness, Lavoie instructs the entrepreneurship researcher to focus on the culturally embedded participant who picks up and alters the gist of a conversation instead of being oriented towards ‘the isolated maverick who finds objective profits others overlooked’ (Lavoie 1991: 36). Here, however, is where Lavoie parts with Kirzner as he documents how Kirzner’s conception also remains tied to the foundational role of Robinson Crusoe in economics and hence to the theoretical construct of the isolated individual. This methodological individualism forms the backbone of much of entrepreneurship theorizing, thus giving ontological priority to the individual instead of understanding how action is formed within a culturally-embedded context. This deeply-rooted Cartesian reflex is the reason why several interpretive attempts have stopped halfway.<sup>7</sup> However, in line with Gadamer’s



hermeneutical theory of language and culture, for Lavoie, entrepreneurship is a matter of joining conversational processes and nudging them in new directions. This study of such conversational shifts has been more systematically taken up in narrative and discursive approaches to entrepreneurship (Hjorth and Steyaert 2004, see below).

Closely related to and inhabiting an interpretive approach is the phenomenological perspective. We can see the kinship of these two approaches in Berglund's (2007: 75) statement that 'enactive design and interpretation is congenial to philosophical phenomenology and phenomenologically inspired methodologies'. Thus far, phenomenology has primarily informed the methodological perspective of entrepreneurship studies (Steyaert 1996, Cope 2005, Berglund 2007), but it has great potential to substantiate our understanding of such central 'abstracts' as risk, uncertainty and opportunity as we experience them in the liveliness of everyday life. Thus it can help to counteract the often reductionist and thinning reflexes of entrepreneurship theorists. For instance, instead of seeing alertness as a form of 'paying' attention, a phenomenologist would inquire about the qualitatively different ways in which people are alert, grounding this understanding in the assumption that human action is embodied and embedded 'in' the life world. A phenomenological treatise is thereby inherently processual as it focuses on 'lived' and 'living' experience and thus on the minutiae of experiencing that constitute one's life world.

Various options exist for anyone pursuing a phenomenological enquiry, depending on whether one is grounded in the transcendental phenomenology of Husserl (Berglund 2007), the hermeneutic phenomenology of Heidegger (Cope 2005) or in a Gadamerian phenomenology as suggested by Lavoie (1991). Spinoza *et al.* (1997) undertook one of the most elaborate attempts at developing a phenomenologically-inspired theory in their seminal work entitled *Disclosing New Worlds*. They draw on the thinking of Heidegger to establish an anti-Cartesian ontology of process as disclosure; that is, they seek an answer to how we encounter things in the course of our everyday practices and thereby bring new worlds into being. This process, which the authors call history-making, is chiefly reserved for those actions and events which fundamentally 'change the way in which we understand and deal with ourselves and with things' (Spinoza *et al.* 1997: 2).

The authors are not primarily interested in how people endow everyday occurrences with meaning, but with people's 'ability to appreciate and engage in the ontological skill of disclosing *new* ways of being' (p. 1; italics added). Disclosure is about the way people act upon, refine and even extend the traditional ways of doing things. It requires a sensitivity to detect the 'small perturbations that rule-followers miss' (p. 179). In the case of entrepreneurship, this sensitivity does not allow for the simple following of rules but rather presupposes that the actor identifies the unique 'anomalies' in the disclosive space where they find themselves. The authors centre on the process of 'sensing' an anomaly, that is, 'a disharmony between [an entrepreneur's] understanding of what they do and what in fact they do' (p. 193).

What makes change possible, then, is that entrepreneurs hold on to these anomalies long enough for their meaning to become clear; they then reduce the given disharmony by changing the style in which it initially appeared. Hence, Spinoza *et al.* (1997) see articulation as a central disclosing activity. That is, entrepreneurs stimulate change by bringing marginal practices or concerns to the centre of people's attention (by making them more important to them) and then by reconfiguring the practice of concern.

As the authors claim with regard to reconfiguration, ‘successful entrepreneurs bring about social change by modifying the style of particular subworlds or the style of society in general’; they specify that the ‘entrepreneur reconfigures the style of a disclosive space by installing a new product, service, or practice in that space’ (p. 68).

Two additional points deserve particular attention here. As with the interpretive approach, disclosure is essentially about the embeddedness of creative processes and, by implication, about emphasizing that change only becomes possible if the person is familiar with the disclosive space she/he wants to alter. Since each disclosive space has its own requirements, entrepreneurs can only shift the customary ways of doing things if they gain a thorough contextual sensibility. Second, and relatedly, if we disclose disharmonies that common sense would lead us to overlook, that action is not primarily Cartesian but rather a distinct ‘skill of intensified practical involvement’ (p. 43) and ‘a new mood of engaging activity’ (Thrift 2001: 427). Thus it follows that history-making is for the most part predicated on a practice of ‘involved experimentation’ (Spinosa *et al.* 1997: 24) where change is stimulated as people continuously examine their lived experience of a given disharmony.

### 5. The dialogical offspring of social constructionist approaches

Various forms of social constructionism have imported and extended interpretive approaches. Social constructionist approaches, which partly concur with Weick’s view of process as enactment (Ochberg 1994), particularly stress the linguistic construction of reality (Hjorth and Steyaert 2004) while shedding light on the relational encounters through which the ‘creation of a living world’ is made possible (Steyaert 2004a). The label of social constructionism has been ‘maligned and misappropriated’ (Fletcher 2006: 422) and has come to function as a highly problematic umbrella term for pointing at a variety of approaches (Pearce 1992); now, however, more and more scholars are referring to processes of social construction to describe their theoretical approach (Bouwen and Steyaert 1990, Chell 2000, Downing 2005, Lindgren and Packendorff 2006). Recently, Fletcher (2006) has tried to create some order in this multi-faceted landscape by distinguishing between social constructivist, social constructionist and relational constructionist approaches; in conjunction with a text analysis of a biographical start-up account, she documented how each approach would offer different but crucial accents on the understanding of the story.

While all of these approaches attempt to do away with determinist and dualist explanations, they differ in the amount of agency they ascribe to individuals and in the ways they explain the interplay between agency and structure. For instance, a social constructivist approach focuses upon (mostly individualized) cognitive processes through which individuals mentally construct their worlds using socially mediated categories, simultaneously ‘downplaying’ the role of language as an external expression of internal cognitions. A social constructionist approach draws upon processes of structuration (Chiasson and Saunders 2005); it attends to the interrelationship between agency and structure and points out how specific entrepreneurial practices are embedded in social and cultural contexts that are (partly) formed and performed in language. Fletcher (2006) also turns to relational constructionism, which looks at the relatedness between the objects, ideas, images, discourses and practices that constitute social reality. The focus on relatedness makes it

possible to illustrate how the emergence of a business idea can be construed as a relational activity where multiple actions are continuously supplemented in a dialogical wave that forms from pieces of previous conversations, experiences and events.

Furthermore, a relational focus, which primarily tries to consider the critique of linguistic reductionism, builds a bridge between this relational constructionist perspective and two other perspectives which I discuss below: the actor-network theory and radical processual perspective. Before doing so, however, I must point out that the enactment of the entrepreneurial process as a process of social construction is formed by what Fletcher (2006), informed by Bourriaud's 'relational aesthetics', calls an 'unfinished discursiveness'. The social construction of entrepreneurship is thus conceptualized through a myriad of linguistic forms and processes, such as metaphors (Dodd 2002), storytelling (Pitt 1998), dramatization (Downing 2005) and discourses (Perren and Jennings 2005). While these forms of linguistic construction are closely related, some studies can be said to be more narrative in focus while others are inspired more by discourse analysis (Phillips and Hardy 2002).

As an ontological condition of social life (Bruner 1991), a narrative perspective on entrepreneurship, one that consists of various approaches, claims that new organizations are constructed through countless stories that perpetually repeat, contradict and extend each other. Thus, entrepreneurship is seen as a process of storytelling through which people become implied in what Davies and Harré (1990) call an ongoing emplotment: actors and networks continuously become connected and disconnected. Both Steyaert (1997) and Rae (2004) emphasize that narrative approaches enhance the contextual and embedded understanding of the entrepreneurial process. This happens primarily because stories are conceived of not as individual expressions of entrepreneurs but as re-performances of cultural metaphors (Dodd 2002), macro-cultural discourses (Lawrence and Phillips 2004) and political discourses (Perren and Jennings 2005).

Of course, these linguistic resources simultaneously limit and facilitate the thinking and talking of entrepreneurs. Put slightly differently, the entrepreneur is never the sole author of his or her story since narratives are always contingent on the available scripts of a given historical period and subject to conversational positionings (Davies and Harré 1990). This further implies that stories are always 'accepted, rejected, or improved upon by the [entrepreneur's] partners in the conversation' (Czarniawska 1997: 15). Narrative approaches in entrepreneurship studies have contributed considerably to innovative conceptualizations of the entrepreneurial process. This becomes evident through studies that came to link narrative and narration with legitimation and legitimacy building (Lounsbury and Glynn 2001, O'Connor 2004), with identity construction and self-identity (Foss 2004, Downing 2005, Down 2006), with personal learning and practical knowledge (Rae and Carswell 2000, O'Connor 2007) and with the creative moment of events and timing (Boutaiba 2004, Hjorth 2007).

A discursive study of entrepreneurship can also take diverse forms (Danziger 1997). Some studies look at the minutiae of discourse as social practices, as illustrated by a study of the mixture of interpretive repertoires involved in creating an entrepreneurial company (Steyaert 1996). The concept of entrepreneuring focuses then on the ongoing construction of reality as several participants negotiate by connecting various configurations of meaning and discourses into a common, conversational process. Other studies concentrate on power and subjectivity as

rooted in the work of Foucault and address entrepreneurial discourse as particular forms and practices of being an entrepreneur. For instance, those studying female entrepreneurship have pointed out that rendering the entrepreneur as a male sets up the norm for the way that female entrepreneurs are constructed (Ahl 2004, Bruni *et al.* 2004, Petterson 2004). This latter view invites us not to see entrepreneurs as the masters of their own creation, but rather to emphasize that entrepreneurial identities are formed in the web of actualized discourses and their inherent power struggles that prioritize certain realities above others.

For Foucault (1984), discourses create truth-effects and power-effects so that actions and identities become shaped in an expected way through the connection between knowledge and power. Whatever we do, actions invariably become imprinted, if not imposed, by a certain power/knowledge nexus and by institutional norms. Actions are an effect of the process of scrutinizing by the gaze of normalization and hierarchization and of the processes of resistance through experimental self-creation. Bruni *et al.* (2004) set out to apply this Foucauldian theory of governmentality, undertaking a discursive analysis of entrepreneurship research on women entrepreneurs. They speak of an 'entrepreneur mentality' to capture the way that entrepreneurial discourse forms a system of acting and thinking that normalizes certain forms of being an entrepreneur and excludes other forms. They conclude that even studies of female entrepreneurship tend to implicitly reproduce the male experience as a preferred norm.

Thus, discursive studies of entrepreneurs take a critical stance towards entrepreneurship studies, claiming that it seems to act as a value-free endeavour (perhaps either gender-free or culture-free). Moreover, discursive studies object to the field of entrepreneurship studies because it supports a hegemonic ideology of enterprising that applies only to certain economically dominant parts of the world (Ogbor 2000), and that forms the latest version of governmentality through which people become subject to certain scripts of behaving in which they are active, responsible and full of initiative (Hjorth *et al.* 2003).

As social constructionist approaches are increasingly used to study the entrepreneurial process, a coherent although multifaceted dialogical perspective is becoming visible on the horizon of entrepreneurial research. That is, social constructionist approaches represent one of the major candidates to counterbalance the overriding mentalism of current entrepreneurial studies by developing a logic they call conversationalism. The potential of narrative, metaphorical and discursive analysis lies perhaps not only 'in their singular application but above all in their combined use, in the interrelationships between narration, drama, metaphor, discourse and deconstruction' (Steyaert 2004a: 8). Drawing on a Bakhtinian-inspired dialogism (Holquist 2002), I suggest we call this combined perspective a prosaic approach, as it stresses that the entrepreneurial process is based on a form of co-authorship that interweaves collective stories, dramatic interactions, generative metaphors and concurring discourses (Steyaert 2004a). The notion of the prosaic emphasizes the surprise, the open-endedness and the unfinalizable character of everyday entrepreneurial work. Similarly, Bakhtin (1981) characterizes the creation process using the terms addressivity or dialogic surplus, as language opens up different meanings. Furthermore, this notion of the prosaic emphasizes that narration is both performed and performative (Steyaert 2007), intensively bringing together both recurrent and habitual practices and open-ended performance. Narration brings into play a dramaturgical logic: it supports the view that entrepreneurial identity,

following a Goffmanian analysis (Goffman 1959), can be seen as a form of self-presentation. Thus the entrepreneurial process is dramatically enacted in social interaction – but in connection with existing storylines, frames and genres.

One of the most elaborate attempts to conceive of the social construction of the entrepreneurial process is the conceptual framework developed by Downing (2005); in it, narrative and dramaturgical elements are interwoven based on theoretical lines initially spun by Goffman, Burke, Harré and Polkinghore. Downing believes that the narrative and dramatic dynamics of interactions selectively and creatively produce and transform the roles and resources of a given order into a new social reality. In this process, actors must constantly reconcile the contingencies and surprises of particular events with prevailing rules and customs. Taken together, Downing's (2005) emphasis on contingency and Steyaert's (2004a) emphasis on open-endedness open up a non-teleological perspective, one to which I now turn. The emphasis on social interaction and performance already shows a point where it may be possible to counter the critique of linguistic reductionism that has been used to discredit social constructionism by claiming that 'the discursive turn is threatening to become a discursive retreat' (Cromby and Nightingale 1999: 13). This perspective forms the point of departure for the next section where I endeavour to move beyond the logic of a potential exclusive textualism into a logic of practice.

## **6. Beyond teleology: the pragmatist and practice-based perspectives**

At this point, we have crossed an invisible line in this paper, as the perspectives I will discuss now are either new or have thus far been rarely applied – that is, published – in the context of entrepreneurship studies. However, they attract attention in the corridors of conferences, they guide Ph.D. projects and they form the point of departure of new applications for research funding. In that sense, I hope to be able to show that these perspectives are promising candidates for rethinking and radicalizing the processual understanding of entrepreneurship. In this section, I discuss Sarasvathy's theory of effectuation that is (partly) grounded in a pragmatist philosophy of science; I also turn to the possibilities of the so-called practice-based theorizing.

Effectuation as a form of 'making it happen' (Sarasvathy 2004) understands entrepreneurship as an endogenous process of interactive human action 'striving to imagine and create a better world' (Sarasvathy *et al.* 2003: 155). The theory of effectuation (Sarasvathy 2001) draws upon the distinction between mainstream economic theories, which see entrepreneurial actions as taking place in spaces that are known and that allow for prediction, and her own view, which sees entrepreneurial action as occurring in situations of uncertainty (Dew and Sarasvathy 2002). Thus effectuation has two implications. It challenges the economist's view of 'utility maximization in the individual, profit maximization in the firm, and welfare maximization in the economy' (Sarasvathy 2002: 95). It also introduces an alternative perspective that highlights entrepreneurial imagination and conjoins the task of entrepreneurship with creating 'the society we want to live in from the society we have to live in' (Sarasvathy 2002: 110).

In brief, Sarasvathy (1998) bases her theory of effectuation on empirical work she carried out as part of her doctoral studies on entrepreneurial expertise; she also

integrated theories ranging from Hans Joas's (1996) theory of the creativity of action to pragmatist philosophers such as William James and John Dewey. Further, she refers to Karl Weick to emphasize that entrepreneurs have an active influence on their environment rather than being solely influenced by it (Sarasvathy 2003). Clearly, she seeks to challenge the rational choice paradigm of economics and to supplement it (but not replace it; see Dew and Sarasvathy 2002) with a perspective that construes entrepreneurship as an open-ended process that creates unanticipated and often multiple ends. Following Dew and Sarasvathy (2002), effectuation 'steps up to the plate where rational choice bows out of the arena – where predictability, pre-existent goals, and an independent environment are not available to the decision maker'. This implies, in turn, that effectuation sets the entrepreneur 'free to *wield* uncertainty as a powerful tool in the creation of new ends' (Dew and Sarasvathy 2002; emphasis in the original).

I believe that the single most important aspect of effectuation is its ability to account for the non-teleological aspect of entrepreneurial action. Hence it facilitates a view in which the entrepreneur is not supposed to rationally evaluate and/or calculate available opportunities but instead is to actively create the conditions upon which he/she wants to act. On the face of it, effectuation is the 'inverse of causation' (Sarasvathy 2003: 206); we are not to assume that entrepreneurs simply choose between available, pre-existing options but we are to accept that they actively generate 'the alternatives themselves' (Sarasvathy 2003: 207). Thus entrepreneurship is often more about constructing the part of the world with which entrepreneurs are concerned than about producing calculations and acting upon their script.

I see another reason why effectuation is worthwhile: it gives weight to those features of a processual understanding that focus on its context of uncertainty where neither means nor ends are predetermined; instead, they are constructed in an incremental way, i.e. in the process of the making. Sarasvathy (2004: 524) considers effectuation 'at heart a theory of design' but seems to give 'plenty of' agency to the individual as it is 'the person/s who is making it happen' (p. 522) and suggests 'the existence of a maker' (p. 529). This, in my view, leaves the individual as something unexplained and outside the logic of the artificial and plunges the theory back into the realm of the cognitive.

Broadly speaking, the model of effectuation takes its inspiration from pragmatism, but in its efforts to conceptualize process, the practical turn also considers other sources. It is currently being enacted in social theory (Schatzki 2002, Stern 2003) and experimented with in the field of organization (Gherardi 2006) and strategy theory (Chia and MacKay 2007). It also draws on linguistic theory (especially Wittgenstein, see Schatzki 1996), on phenomenology (especially Heidegger, see Chia and Holt 2006), on interpretivism (especially Garfinkel's ethnomethodology) and on Marxist theory (Prasad 2005). It does not break with these inspirational perspectives but rather reorients the analysis of process towards the complex notion of practice. For instance, Wittgenstein reminds us that to participate in the practice of a linguistic game implies sharing the life form that makes such practice possible in the first place (Gherardi 2000). With regard to phenomenology, the idea of 'the active and reflexive engagement of individual actors in all situations' (Prasad 2005: 185) is maintained by practice-based approaches. These practices, however, also engender a break with phenomenology's excessive subjectivism, while turning toward a more relational and process-oriented notion of power (Everett 2002, Prasad 2005). This reorientation brings with it a vast potential for specific applications ranging from activity theory, to

situated learning theory, cultural practice theory and actor-network theory (Gherardi 2000).

Furthermore, practice-based theorizing entails a social ontology that connects to and complicates the relational orientation of certain forms of social constructionism. Schatzki (1996: 11) refers to such theorists as Bourdieu, Giddens, Lyotard, Taylor, and to some extent Laclau and Mouffe, as these authors seem to 'agree that practices are not only pivotal objects of analysis in an account of contemporary Western society, but also the central phenomenon by reference to which other social entities such as actions, institutions, and structures are to be understood'. Practice theory, like some of the perspectives mentioned above, tries to overcome the classical dichotomy between mind and body, and in fact tries to connect mind and body into a new 'formula' which Schatzki calls 'the formation of an expressive body' (1996: 58). The connection between mind, body and social practice embraces the idea that life conditions become real in the activities of socially moulded expressive bodies. Both mind and body are made possible by participation in extant social practices. Social practices are open, temporally unfolding nexuses of actions that are enacted through bodily doings and sayings that 'people directly perform' (Schatzki 2002: 73). Thus, practices are non-individualistic phenomena since 'the organization of a practice is not a collection of properties of individual people [but] is a feature of the practice, expressed in the open-ended set of actions that compose the practice' (Schatzki 2005: 480).

While few specific and detailed attempts have been made within entrepreneurship studies, I still believe that a practice-oriented scope of the entrepreneurial process can elicit many possibilities to research the praxis of social theorizing in the entrepreneurship field. One possibility for developing a practice-oriented social theory of entrepreneuring follows from Schatzki (2002) who directly discusses the work of Spinosa *et al.* (1997), noticing both the similarities and differences between 'their notion of worlds as meaning-disclosing, arrangement-encompassing practice plenums' and his 'notion of practice-order complexes' (Schatzki 2002: 153). This literally stimulates an invitation not only to bring his work into entrepreneurship studies (as has been done in organization studies; see Schatzki (2005)) but also to develop the work of Spinosa *et al.* into a fully-fledged practice theory.

In a similar, connected vein, it might be useful to try to extend the idea of effectuation through the thinking about practice. Bearing in mind that Sarasvathy draws upon pragmatism, especially on Joas's theory of creative action, it might be possible to place her theory of effectuation into conversation with Bourdieu's praxeology (Bourdieu 1990). Inspired by the way that Dalton (2004) suggested incorporating Bourdieu into Joas's concept of creative action, the question of how to balance habitual practices and creative action could provide another possible entrance into practice-based theorizing for entrepreneurship studies.

A further possibility might be to look at how Chia and MacKay (2007) situate a practice perspective within the field of strategy and to formulate what they call post-processual challenges. Importantly, the notion of 'post-processual' immediately leads to a 'comedy of errors' as it refers to the more narrow use of the term process in the strategy field.<sup>8</sup> Chia and MacKay (2007) see the focus on practice in strategy research as a way to study the internal life of process as it is constituted through organizational practices and routines. While they fully embrace a social ontology, they are especially keen to turn around the locus of engagement towards a field of trans-individual social practices. They construe actors and processes as subordinate to practices in order to radically leave behind the distinction between micro and macro

and hence to turn away from the micro-macro activities of individuals and organizations. They see micro- and macro-entities as secondary stabilized instantiations of practice-complexes.

Their argument can serve as an important guide for all those who want to explore the full consequences of the practical turn in social theory and who are eager to cut entrepreneurship loose from its controlling marriage to methodological individualism. Doing so would make it possible to conceive of the entrepreneurial process as a culturally shaped achievement, the result of engaging with and transforming social practices of doing and living. In this connection, I can point to some tentative attempts by de la Ville (2003) and Hjorth and Steyaert (2003), who draw upon de Certeau's understanding of practices and tactics to point at practices of resistance and poaching that are elements of the entrepreneurial process (de Certeau 1984). While de Certeau is an obvious candidate in the context of entrepreneurship studies, especially in light of his emphasis on creativity, these initial conceptual explorations based on his work might become connected to the understandings of practice in the work of Bourdieu, Foucault and Schatzki.

### **7. Relational materialist conceptualizations: from actor-network theory to radical process philosophy**

Both actor-network theory and radical processual theory partly continue the anti-essentialist assumptions of social constructionist and practice-based theorizing; they also relate to the connectionist interests of complexity theory. Still, these first two approaches differ considerably from the latter ones in that they prioritize some assumptions related to a materialist ontology. That is, actor-network theory especially turns to non-human actants while radical process theory emphasizes the ontological notion of becoming to distinguish itself from a being ontology (Chia 2003). So far, neither of these multi-faceted approaches has been put to the best possible use in entrepreneurship studies, although I see some interesting indications of a turn in their favour.

Actor-network theory (ANT, Latour 2005) combines two ontological principles: material relationalism and ontological performativity (Gherardi and Nicolini 2005). Thus it continues both the relational and practice-oriented emphases that were identified in relation to the social constructionist and practice-based perspectives, respectively. While the inspirations for ANT are multiple, making its scope hybrid, ANT has never been stabilized into a clearly identifiable approach (Latour 2005). Its fundamental variations from social constructionism appear in its rethinking of the non-human and of the notion of action in general. While its emphasis is also on social process, it does not take the social for granted but rather reconstructs it as a patterned network of heterogeneous materials – not only people but also machines, animals, texts, objects, buildings and so on – which are kept together by active processes of ordering. Process is conceptualized in conjunction with the notion of 'translation', which refers to the double geometric and semiotic movement of an entity in time and space and of an entity that changes from one context to another.

However, this perspective is anti-entitative and should be thought of as a form of 'actor-networking', since no actor-network can exist before it undergoes its own process of translation. Thus translation is performed through translation practices, emphasizing 'the relational effects that recursively generate and reproduce themselves



thanks to the maneuvers and strategies of translation' (Gherardi and Nicolini 2005: 287). While I see promise in thinking of the entrepreneurial process through an ANT-conceptualization, especially for technological entrepreneurship, thus far few researchers have applied the concepts in a few contexts, for instance: in innovation in a SME (Gherardi and Nicolini 2005) and in rural activities (Lockie 2006).

From an ANT perspective, the entrepreneurial process is reconstituted as a narrative trajectory, where the researcher documents the continuous assembling, connecting and dissociating of actants and the kind of rhetorics, narratives and discourses that are mobilized and come to prevail. An example of an ANT study in the field of entrepreneurship studies is that of Gherardi and Nicolini (2005) who distinguish between a focused and a dispersive form of actor-networking. While the former rests on the role of powerful actors and their capacity to mobilize relevant resources and to engender focus by prioritizing the protagonists, the latter pays greater attention to those who dispute or disregard the propositions of enrolling actants and form dissidents within the emerging actor-network. Gherardi and Nicolini consider the focused version as featuring the typical characteristics of an entrepreneurial undertaking as it is based on a restricted number of actants and a conception of action as direct doing. While the ANT-approach has indeed been criticized for being inappropriate for addressing power processes and for subscribing to a critical analysis (Whittle and Spicer 2008), it is appropriate for studying the entrepreneurial process as the emergence of actor-networks that each form 'a unique and unrepeatable chain of events, a situated process that must be investigated empirically according to its historical and contextual circumstances' (Gherardi and Nicolini 2005: 290).

Another creative adaptation of ANT acts on and develops the early reading of Cooper (1992: 270) who combined the work of Law and Latour with Michel Serres's topology of movement into a logic of representation which 'traverses a mobile space of non-localizable relationships'. This idea of representation, which anticipates Cooper's (2005) later logic of relationality, is described by Öрге (2007), who studied an e-commerce start-up company. He describes entrepreneurship as a relational process that involves bringing together various, not yet connected, elements into a network of relations through material transformation. Thus he conceives of entrepreneurship as a representational process that consists of an active intervention into the flow of events, and that forms an attempt at creative world-making. Öрге also theorizes about the dimensions of time and space as an unfolding complex and points at the self-referential dimension of entrepreneuring as it acts on the very centre that undertakes it.

Using this work by Öрге, it becomes possible to create a bridge between the ANT-approach and radical process theory. That is, the ANT-approach emphasizes the assembling process, indicating that it draws some of its inspiration from radical process philosophy and especially the Deleuzian rhizomatic conception of process. Rather than merely serving as inspiration, Deleuze's neo-materialist philosophy of becoming might bring entrepreneurship studies into a new and radical form of conceptual experimentation and creation. The 'radicality' of this theorizing lies in its extensive reliance on so-called process philosophy (Steyaert 1997, Chia 2003), which draws on the work of Nietzsche, Whitehead and Bergson and more recently on that of Deleuze and Guattari (1986, 1987).<sup>9</sup>

This perspective provides an opportunity to make a U-turn in our ontological thinking, not least because it points at the irreducible multiplicity of becoming in an

attempt ‘to explain the wonder that there can be stasis given the primacy of process’ (Massumi 2002: 7). The concept of becoming is more than just a verb; in itself it serves as an open-ended concept that can be used to point at the restless primordial indetermination; it can also be made singular, as an event, assemblage, rhizome, affect, etc. (Deleuze and Guattari 1987). To explore the concept of becoming, one must engage with the complex conceptual rhizomatics of Deleuze’s work and the challenging philosophical ideas it implies.

Deleuze’s work offers not only challenge but also inspiration, for those who want to rethink entrepreneuring and potentially overturn many of the earlier attempts. It is hard to imagine a more exciting route for this work than exploring the multiple forms of the concept of becoming, once we learn to think along the lines of the Deleuzian neo-materialist ontology of affect and desire. Sørensen (2006) offers one example of such work; discussing creativity and innovation in organizational life, he tells a classical story of entrepreneurship but reconceptualizes both entrepreneurship and creativity by relating them to the concepts of the event, the body and affect. He connects the movement of ideas to the intense ‘e-motions’ of the inventor who becomes the host for singular, intensive affects and who ‘experiences the multiplicity flows, the connectivity of desire that just *is* creativity’ (Sørensen 2006: 140; italics in original).

Such studies of entrepreneurship as examples of ‘making events work’ are currently rare. While it might take some time for more studies with a Deleuzian way of thinking to emerge, some explorations in the realms of poststructuralist thinking serve as useful preparatory work. For instance, Weiskopf (2007) reiterates the richness of Foucault’s work to envision the concept of entrepreneurial becoming as an ethico-aesthetic practice; meanwhile Steyaert and Dey (2006) have explored Derrida’s (1989) concept of invention to reconstruct entrepreneurship as a form of deconstructive creativity.

## **8. The conceptual potential of entrepreneuring: towards a social ontology of becoming**

Having completed this overview, which is neither an exhaustive nor a pure classification, one might ask if we should again plead for others to use the concept of entrepreneuring. In my assessment, this review has demonstrated the increasing momentum across the spectrum of perspectives and concepts that address the complexity of theorizing process – and, notably – has not felt the urge to ‘take refuge’ in the term of entrepreneuring. While the early attempts, as epitomized in the developmental and evolutionary models, are equilibrium-bound, more recent theorizing in entrepreneurship has been enriched by conceptual efforts that work with a creative process view (Sarasvathy *et al.* 2003).

Whereas the various conceptualizations reviewed here do overlap a fair bit, partially sharing fundamental assumptions and/or using similar theoretical notions, the fact that most notably connects these different views of worldmaking is that they all break with the dominant ontology in entrepreneurship studies. The creative process view to which they all subscribe engenders a fundamental rupture with mainstream approaches that conceive of entrepreneurship as being located in a stable world, that work with a logic of causation and that, consequently, emphasize entrepreneurial activities as a kind of allocation or discovery. Following Sarasvathy (2001: 261–262), ‘researchers have thus far explained entrepreneurship not as the creation of artifacts by imaginative actors fashioning purpose and meaning out of contingent endowments

and endeavors but as the inevitable outcome of mindless 'forces', stochastic processes, or environmental selection'.

Contrasting the creative process view with the allocative and discovery view, which coincide in large part with the developmental and the evolutionary model in my overview, Sarasvathy (2003) grounds the creative process view in pragmatism. While that anchorage is legitimate, this paper has documented that a creative process view can be related to and enriched by many more perspectives. Thus, the creative process perspective, which chiefly tries to explain 'ways of worldmaking' (Goodman 1978) and which understands the entrepreneurial process as creation, not only forms a break with the developmental and evolutionary worldview but it also opens up to a rich set of research positions that go beyond pragmatism and enter entrepreneurial studies in a broader field of social-theoretical notions and philosophical positions. These perspectives – from emergence as order creation in complexity theory to entrepreneurial becoming in a radical process philosophy – bring with them various concepts of creation which can be related, combined or re-invented in a continuous process of conceptual creation.

To make such ruptures visible and to differentiate the use of the term process within creative process theories from the way it is conventionally used in the discovery view, the notion of entrepreneuring might act as the conceptual attractor around which a community of scholars could assemble to experiment with this range of concepts. Of course, this is not intended as a form of conceptual reductionism or to advance a comprehensive theory; indeed, it would be meaningless to reserve only one notion for all the conceptual richness this review has sketched. Rather, the notion of entrepreneuring can point at the possibility of fabulation or collective enunciation (Deleuze and Guattari 1986); through that process various conceptual attempts form a fictional anticipation of the theoretical becoming of entrepreneurship. Therefore, I see the term entrepreneuring as a travelling concept, as a potential space for theorizing and undertaking conceptual experimentations in relation to the idea of process, rather than freezing or stabilizing the thinking that has just begun.

Some parameters which can guide such collective experimentation are currently being identified. First, entrepreneuring is already beginning to follow a logic of recursivity (as especially inscribed in complexity theory, the ANT-perspective, social constructionism and practice-based theorizing), undermining any kind of recourse to *a priori* entities that can function as unquestioned grounds for explanation. Second, entrepreneuring will help to 'thicken' the understanding of the entrepreneurial process, both by breaking with a dualist world where object and subject are disconnected and by situating process in the lived world and experience. Third, entrepreneuring situates entrepreneurship as an attempt to change the conversational reality; thus it explains how entrepreneurship is always embedded in and sensitive to the streams of the past and the present and is making a creative and critical difference in the realm of the possible. Fourth, entrepreneuring changes the conceptual focus by centring upon the notion of practices that connect to lived and observable experience and that emphasize the connection to the conversational texture of cultural, political and social forces. Fifth, entrepreneuring, especially when conceived within a neo-materialist ontology, situates entrepreneurship in a new form of connectivity and assemblage where both human and non-human elements are included to give form to the trajectories of a world in its becoming.

For those who would further explore and experiment with these parameters of entrepreneuring, the present review offers vast conceptual possibilities to play with

and to concretize the process through such notions as recursivity, enactment, disclosure, narration, discourse, dramatization, dialogicality, effectuation, social practice, translation, and assemblage. Whether this conceptual potential helps to create a shifting attractor for the field of entrepreneurship studies will depend on and require a firm and radical intensification of new connections; hence it will depend on how scholars can embrace different ontologies, epistemologies, and practices of researching and knowing (Prasad 2005).

Experimenting with these concepts will require scholars to enter other social, theoretical and philosophical scapes than those which are currently practiced; this will not be simple, given the single-paradigm track record of entrepreneurship studies (Grant and Perren 2002). Thus, we cannot let ourselves ignore this unused potential; we must emphasize that great imaginative effort is needed as processual theories are not in a dominant position in current research, even if they are often called vital (Fletcher 2006, Zahra, 2007). For instance, Fletcher (2006: 424) notices that 'empirical studies applying process understandings of opportunity recognition are still quite rare'. We should not take this caution too lightly, since we will not succeed in further trying out and conceptually refining the various perspectives without a paradigmatic overture and a transition to a social ontology that would enable entrepreneurship studies to explore the full range of social theories.

To move the understanding of the creation process from the agency of imaginative actors towards creation as a social practice, one of the most difficult remaining challenges is to transcend the methodological individualism that was imported into entrepreneurship studies from economics and psychology without much reflection. Given that many theoretical streams in entrepreneurship 'all continue to be beholden to the methodological individualism of "Robinson Crusoe economics"' (Berger 1991: 7), it will be hard for entrepreneurship scholars to rid themselves of this problematic heritage; even those forms of enquiry that are, in principle, critical of the earlier perspective sometimes succumb to bringing back a form of individualist reductionism. For instance, we have noticed that some interpretive and phenomenological stances manage to reinstate the focus on subjective and partly individualistic units of analysis; when that happens, even the concept of effectuation has a comparable effect. For entrepreneurship scholars, then, it will be no small transformation to embrace the complexities and possibilities within a social ontology of reality and to fully embrace the principle of relationality (Cooper 2005). However, for those who want to shift the locus of analysis away from the entrepreneur or the individual-opportunity nexus, the possibilities are vast: one can explore contextual embeddedness, relational entourage, linguistic performativity, non-teleological openness, connective assemblage and creative involution as different points of entry into a social ontology. The concept of entrepreneuring as a conceptual attractor thus points entrepreneurship studies towards a social ontology of relatedness. Rather than stick to 'the primacy of mentalism, cognitivism or even intentionality in engaging with the day-to-day affairs of the world' (Chia and MacKay 2007: 228), the social constructionist perspectives point in the direction of a conversationalism. Meanwhile the more radical readings of a processual perspective – the practice-based and the radical processual theory – suggest, respectively, a form of practical holism and neo-materialism. Given the exciting possibility of using entrepreneuring as a conceptual attractor to adopt a relational turn and to move entrepreneurship towards a social ontology of becoming, we can see clearly that playtime is not over yet (Korsgaard 2007). Indeed, it is just beginning.

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## Notes

1. The notion of the attractor, which is derived from complexity theory, is originally known as the Lorenz attractor and has been used to describe phase changes or bifurcations in dynamic, self-organizing systems. However, new interpretations have emerged in the effort to develop a non-essentialist theory of multiplicity. For a discussion of both a metaphorical and non-metaphorical use of the notion attractor in social theory, see Mackenzie (2005).
2. Macmillan was interested in habitual entrepreneurs; he implicitly reserved the notion of entrepreneuring for the repeated effort of so-called business generators or habitual entrepreneurs; he also wrote of 'an "experience curve" for entrepreneuring' (Macmillan 1986: 242).
3. An entitative approach treats a person or organization as a thing or entity with distinct features which are independent of the process or context. For a critique of the entitative approach, see Hosking and Morley (1991).
4. The distinction between an arborescent and rhizomatic 'model' of knowledge comes from Deleuze and Guattari (1987). In a rhizome, connections can be multiplied through ongoing associations and by creating of multiple entry and exit points. This is in contrast to an understanding where entrepreneurship studies are seen as 'rooted' like a tree (Landström 1999), creating a hierarchy between disciplines and limiting the range of possible connections.
5. Greiner's model is an example of what Van de Ven and Poole (1995) called a dual-motor theory as it also operates at a dialectical scale.
6. This should not be seen as diminishing the value of an evolutionary perspective, nor does it exclude the possibility that certain ideas from evolutionary theory have been integrated usefully into other perspectives. This becomes clear in the sensemaking perspective where Weick (1979) draws partly upon evolutionary concepts.
7. Examples are the constructivist attempts of Bouchikhi (1993) and the social constructionist attempts of Chell (2000). For a more elaborate discussion, see Steyaert 2004b.
8. This is the classic distinction between so-called content and process theories in strategy theory; also see Zahra (2007) for a comparable distinction in entrepreneurship studies.
9. Process philosophy is more and more considered to think the process of organizing (see Chia 2003, Van de Ven and Poole 2005); however the work of Deleuze and Guattari is so far mostly excluded (for an exception, see Fuglsang and Sørensen 2006).

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